

# Parents in Egypt say 'no' to female genital mutilation

Author:

Wed, 2019-02-06 21:48

BEIRUT: Doctors at two Cairo hospitals will pin blue ribbon badges to the clothing of newborn baby girls on Wednesday as they launch a campaign to persuade parents in Egypt to “say no to female genital mutilation (FGM).”

The country has the highest number of women affected by FGM in the world, with nearly nine in 10 having been cut, according to UN data.

Parents will receive the badges – which resemble the Arabic word “no” and look like an upside down version of awareness ribbons for HIV/AIDS and breast cancer – after signing a pledge that they will not have their daughters cut.

Activists hope more hospitals will join the campaign, which launches on International Day of Zero Tolerance for FGM.

FGM was banned in Egypt in 2008 and criminalized in 2016, but the practice persists, with most procedures now carried out by health professionals.

Many families see FGM as a religious obligation and a way to preserve their daughter’s virginity.

“It is a wrong and ugly belief. We have to make clear that FGM (does not stop) sexual desire,” said pediatric doctor Amira Edris who works at one of the Cairo hospitals.

“I have a veil on my head and I respect religious rules ... but this is not a religious rule – it is a false belief,” she told the Thomson Reuters Foundation.

FGM, which commonly involves the partial or total removal of the external genitalia, is practiced in a swathe of African countries and parts of Asia and the Middle East.

It is often done by traditional cutters with unsterilized blades, but there is an increasing trend for FGM to be carried out by health professionals – particularly in Egypt, Guinea, Kenya, Nigeria and Sudan.

Global anti-FGM group 28 Too Many, which is working with the Egyptian hospitals, said the “medicalization of FGM” was hindering efforts to end the practice.

“By having the backing of hospitals in the campaign, we are showing that FGM is wrong, wherever it is carried out,” said 28 Too Many founder Ann-Marie Wilson.

FGM can cause a host of serious health problems including infections and

infertility.

There has been mounting concern over the practice in Egypt following the deaths of several girls during botched procedures.

Edris said she had been particularly affected by the death of a 7-year-old girl from FGM.

“We couldn’t save her ... she bled to death. I remember she started to hallucinate ... and she knew she was going to die – this really traumatized me,” she said.

Amel Fahmy, director of women’s advocacy group Tadwein which is backing the campaign, said doctors were ideally placed to spread awareness of FGM.

“We can’t be shy about this. It’s time to talk about this as a harmful practice, and for doctors to tell parents you shouldn’t do this to your daughter,” she said.

### **What is female genital mutilation and where does it happen?**

World leaders have pledged to eradicate female genital mutilation (FGM) by 2030, but campaigners say the ancient ritual remains deeply entrenched in many places.

International Day of Zero Tolerance for Female Genital Mutilation on Wednesday will highlight efforts to end the widely condemned practice thought to affect at least 200 million girls and women globally. Here are some facts:

- FGM dates back over 2,000 years and is practiced across many cultures and religions.
- It is practiced in at least 30 countries, mostly in Africa but also in pockets of the Middle East and Asia.
- FGM typically involves the partial or total removal of the external genitalia. In some cases the vaginal opening is sewn up. Other procedures, more common in parts of Asia, include nicking or pricking the clitoris.
- FGM can cause longlasting mental and physical health problems including chronic infections, menstrual problems, infertility, pregnancy and childbirth complications.
- Somalia has the world’s highest FGM prevalence (98 percent of women have been cut), followed by Guinea, Djibouti, Mali and Sierra Leone.
- Of the 28 countries in Africa where FGM is endemic, 22 have legislation criminalizing FGM, although enforcement is generally weak and prosecutions rare.
- Half of all girls who have undergone FGM or are at risk live in three countries – Egypt, Ethiopia and Nigeria – all of which have laws against FGM.

- Chad, Liberia, Mali, Sierra Leone, Somalia and Sudan, which are home to 16 million girls, have no law.
- There is an increasing trend for FGM to be carried out by health professionals rather than traditional cutters, particularly in Egypt, Guinea, Kenya, Nigeria and Sudan.
- The ritual, often justified for cultural or religious reasons, is underpinned by the desire to control female sexuality.
- Somalia and Somaliland are drafting laws against FGM.
- Despite not yet having a law, Somalia announced its first FGM prosecution last year after a 10-year-old girl died.

– Compiled by Reuters



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Egypt](#)

[female](#)

[Cairo](#)

[female genital mutilation](#)

[FGM](#)

Female genital mutilation continues as change comes slowly First female genital mutilation cases to be prosecuted in Britain

---

## Algerian brain drain is pre-election headache for government

Author:

Wed, 2019-02-06 21:32

ALGIERS: No matter who wins Algeria's presidential election, 29-year-old cardiologist Moumen Mohamed plans to seek his fortune elsewhere.

He is one of a growing number of young, educated Algerians who are looking for work in Europe or the Gulf to escape the low salaries imposed by a state-dominated economy at home.

The exodus of doctors, engineers and other highly skilled workers is a headache for a government hoping to engage with its largely youthful electorate ahead of the vote on April 18.

President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, 81, has not said if he will seek a fifth term, although the ruling FLN party, labor unions and business leaders are urging him on.

For young professionals, the question is scarcely relevant. Many feel disconnected from an elite populated by the veterans of Algeria's 1954-1962 war of independence from France, an era they only know about from their grandparents. They want to pursue their careers but feel discouraged by a system that offers low-paid jobs and little opportunity to better themselves.

"I have already done my paperwork to migrate," said Moumen, the cardiologist, who works at a state hospital.

"I am waiting for a response." Nearly 15,000 Algerian doctors work in France now and 4,000 submitted applications to leave their home country last year, according to official figures. The government does not accept all the blame.

"The press has exaggerated the phenomenon ... it is a problem for all Algerians, not just the government," Prime Minister Ahmed Ouyahia said in response to a reporter's question about young doctors leaving.

But in Europe doctors can earn ten times what they get in Algeria, a socialist economy where medical professionals are paid little more than less skilled public employees.

"Salaries, working conditions are bad, and above all there is no appreciation of doctors," said Mohamed Yousfi, head of the specialist doctors' union.

"Our doctors are filling the medical desert in Western countries like France, Canada and Germany. They are also present in the Gulf," said Yousfi, sitting in his office in the public hospital at Boufarik, a town near Algiers.

The hospital, which opened in 1872, was being refurbished by building workers, and Yousfi said medical equipment was readily available.

Algeria has poured billions of dollars in the health sector in the past decades, with around 50,000 doctors and 150,000 beds available in 2018, official data shows.

The North African oil and gas producing nation guarantees citizens cradle-to-grave welfare, but lack of competition from the private sector means some services are poor.

The country only ranks 85 out of 189 in the Human Development Index of living standards compiled by the United Nations Development Programme. This is behind Western and Eastern Europe, the Gulf and even sanctions-hit Iran.

Many public hospitals do not offer the same level of quality as private clinics, which have been slowly opening. Those who can afford it go abroad for treatment.

"We are not respected as we should be as long as our dignitaries, ministers and generals continue to seek treatment overseas," said a doctor who asked not to be named.

Doctors are not the only ones who want to migrate. Pilots, computer engineers, oil drillers and even journalists are also heading for the airport, privately owned Algerian media report.

Around 10,000 engineers and drillers from the state energy firm Sonatrach have left the company in the past ten years, according to senior company officials. "If nothing is done to improve working conditions and salaries, more and more will leave," a Sonatrach source said.

Most professionals head for the Gulf, where they earn good salaries.

"I left Algeria in 2015. I am a computer engineer and I am now in Oman working for a big telecoms firm," Messaoud Benali, 39, said by phone.

"I know plenty of educated Algerians who work in Gulf countries," he said.

Bouteflika must say whether he will run or not by March 3, according to the constitution.

If he does, he is expected to win despite his poor health, because the opposition remains weak and fragmented, analysts say. But how the ruling elite can connect with young people is another question altogether.

Algeria has one of the world's slowest Internet speeds, but its young people are still very tech-savvy.

This became clear when 21-year-old singer Farouk Boujemline invited fans via Snapchat to celebrate his birthday in the center of Algiers.

About 10,000 showed up, jamming the traffic for hours, and police had to set

up barriers around the city's independence monument to make sure the party didn't get out of control.

By contrast, Bouteflika, Prime Minister Ouyahia and several other ministers do not have Twitter accounts to communicate with the public.

Algeria is one of the few countries where government ministries still use fax machines to communicate with the outside world.

"How to reconnect with the young elite, this is the top priority for Algeria's next president," said political analyst Ferrahi Farid.

In the past, authorities could ensure public support by increasing salaries or extending the welfare state.

When riots erupted in Algiers in 2011, the government sought to prevent any spread of the Arab Spring uprisings by offering billions to pay for salary increases, interest-free loans, and thousands of jobs in the public sector.

But 95 percent of government income depends on oil and gas revenues, which halved in the years from 2014 to 2017, forcing officials to impose a public hiring freeze.

"When the oil price is \$100 you can do a lot, but when it is \$50 there is not much you can do," Farid said.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Algeria](#)

[Ahmed Ouyahia](#)

[Algiers](#)

Algeria plans solar energy tenders to tackle rising electricity needs  
Algerian President Bouteflika, 82, to run for 5th term

---

## East Libyan forces say they've taken southern oil field

Author:

Wed, 2019-02-06 21:31

BENGAZI: Libyan forces from the country's east have taken control of the southern Sharara oil field, part of an expansion of Gen. Khalifa Haftar's control over Libya's main revenue generator.

Ahmed Mesmari, spokesman for the Libyan National Army under Haftar's command, said the move was taken in order to provide security to an area that was previously lawless.

He says the move was made in collaboration with local tribes, and grievances over salaries would be addressed.

Libya is governed by rival authorities in Tripoli and the country's east, each of which is backed by an array of militias. Haftar heads the eastern faction.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Khalifa Haftar](#)

[Libya](#)

[Libya oil](#)

Lack of funding may prevent over half of Libya's local elections  
French air strikes 'repel incursion into Chad from Libya'

---

## [US calls on nations to repatriate militants as it leaves Syria](#)

Author:

Tue, 2019-02-05 22:04

WASHINGTON: The US urged other countries Monday to bring home hundreds of Daesh fighters captured in Syria, a delicate issue for allies such as France and Britain as President Donald Trump withdraws troops.

Washington drew a line on the militants two days before foreign ministers from Europe and the Middle East gather in the US capital for talks on how to fight Daesh, once the US military presence ends.

US allies have been grappling for weeks with what to do with foreign fighters detained in the war-ravaged country by the Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), who have warned that they may not be able to guard their jails once US troops leave.

"The United States calls upon other nations to repatriate and prosecute their citizens detained by the SDF and commends the continued efforts of the SDF to return these foreign terrorist fighters to their countries of origin," State Department spokesman Robert Palladino said in a statement.

"Despite the liberation of Daesh-held territory in Iraq and Syria, Daesh remains a significant terrorist threat and collective action is imperative to address this shared international security challenge," Palladino said.

Another US official, speaking to reporters on condition of anonymity, acknowledged that northeastern Syria had become a "very fluid space."

"As events unfold, there are any number of scenarios under which positive control of some of the individuals currently in custody could change," the official said.

He voiced concern that militants could then leave Syria for "other, more permissive places around the world from which they could seek to carry



forward the fight.”

Trump stunned Western allies on Dec. 19 by announcing that the US would pull its 2,000 troops out of Syria, declaring that Daesh had been defeated.

One of the countries most concerned is France, which has been hit by a series of Daesh-inspired attacks including the grisly November 2015 siege of the Bataclan nightclub in Paris.

France – which along with Britain maintains a small deployment of special forces in Syria – last week opened the door to bringing back its citizens, after earlier insisting that the militants should be prosecuted locally and not step foot back in France.

The French Foreign Ministry said its goal was to “avoid the escape and scattering of these potentially dangerous individuals” and acknowledged that the situation on the ground was changing with the US withdrawal.

A French security source, speaking on condition of anonymity, earlier told AFP 130 people could be repatriated. A second French official said the group included 70 to 80 children held with their mothers.

Britain has, meanwhile, been grappling with what to do with the two surviving members of a quartet – nicknamed “The Beatles” for their accents – who were notorious for videotaped beheadings.

Britain has shown no interest in bringing home the Kurdish-jailed pair, Alexandra Amon Kotey and El Shafee El-Sheikh, amid reports they were stripped of their nationality.

A report last year said the US was willing to take them in its military prison at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba – an option that would be deeply controversial in Britain, partly due to the US practice of the death penalty.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[United States](#)

[Syria](#)

[Daesh](#)

Daesh fighters pinned in tiny Syria enclave with families US troops to stay in Syria as long as Iran forces operate on foreign soil – Bolton

---

## [Lack of funding may prevent over half of Libya's local elections](#)

Tue, 2019-02-05 21:17

TRIPOLI: At least 69 municipal councils out of 120 in Libya may not hold elections in March due to a lack of funding by the UN-backed government, the head of the elections committee said.

Libyan authorities allowed municipal elections in 2013 in a bid to end a decades-long legacy of centralization of administration and help communities manage their local affairs.

But the degradation of security conditions after the toppling of long-ruling Muammar Qaddafi and irregular funding hindered the process.

Holding elections to renew the municipal councils requires at least 50 million Libyan dinars (\$36 million), Salem Bentahia, head of the Central Committee for Municipal Councils Elections told Reuters in an interview. For now, the committee has only received 30 percent of that budget, he said.

## **FASTFACT**

**Constituency registration has been reopened with more than 800,000 voters on the list including 504,136 women, according to official figures.**

Without government funds the committee is unable to launch awareness-raising programs on the importance of municipal elections, Bentahia said.

Officials at the internationally recognized government in Tripoli were not immediately available for comment.

Constituency registration has been reopened with more than 800,000 voters on the list including 504,136 women, according to official figures.



Main category:

[Middle-East](#)

Tags:

[Libya](#)

French air strikes 'repel incursion into Chad from Libya' Eastern Libya government delegation visits key southern city of Sabha